CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An online service for facilitating provision of services to customers, wherein the online service

5   comprises:

a network; and

at least one computer coupled to the network and configured to interact with service

providers, brand partners, and customers via the network to maintain a database of

service provider accounts, brand partner accounts, customer accounts,

10   wherein the computer provides a list of service offerings from a plurality of service

providers to a plurality of customers customized in accordance with customization

elements of a brand partner associated with the customer.

2. The online service of claim 1, wherein each of the brand partners are associated with particular

customers and said brand partners are capable of selecting a customized list of service offerings

15   from selected service providers that is stored in said at least one computer, and said customer

accesses said computer to obtain the customized list of service offerings selected by its

associated brand partner.

3. The online service of claim 1, wherein service providers enter service offerings in the database

for access by customers.

20   4. The online service of claim 1, wherein brand partners enter customization elements in the

database.

5. The online service of claim 1, wherein customers enter personal information in the database.

6. The online service of claim 1, wherein the list of service offerings is further customized in accordance with an address associated with the customer.

7. The online service of claim 1, wherein the computer secures order information from customers and directs the order information to appropriate service providers, and updates the customer account in the database to reflect the orders.

8. The online service of claim 7, wherein the computer receives communications from the service providers regarding specific orders, and updates the customer account in the database to reflect the communications.

9. The online service of claim 1, wherein the service offerings are utilities, the brand partners are property managers, and the customers are tenants of properties managed by the property managers.

10. The online service of claim 1, wherein the brand partners include service providers.

11. The online service of claim 1, wherein the brand partners include educational institutions.

12. The online service of claim 1, wherein the brand partners include armed forces.

13. The online service of claim 1, wherein the service offerings include goods for lease offered to the customers.

14. The online service of claim 1, wherein the service offerings include services and goods for purchase offered to the customers.

15. The online service of claim 1, wherein the computer provides a list of service categories to the customer customized in accordance with an address associated with the customer.

16. The online service of claim 15, wherein the computer provides said list of service offerings in response to customer selection of a service category.

17. The online service of claim 16, wherein the computer provides a comparison of customer-selected service offerings in response to customer selection of one or more service providers.

18. The online service of claim 17, wherein the comparison comprises a display page in tabular form having a first rank displaying service offering plans, a second rank for displaying packages, and a third rank for displaying features, wherein the plans, packages, and features for a given service offering are confined to a corresponding file across the ranks.

19. The online service of claim 18, wherein the comparison includes a selection icon for each of the packages, and further includes a selection icon for each row of features.

20. The online service of claim 19, wherein the comparison includes a price for each service offering, and wherein the prices are dynamically updated to reflect a combined selection of plans, packages and features.

21. The online service of claim 19, wherein the comparison includes a pricing label for each feature of each service offering, and wherein the pricing labels are dynamically updated to reflect a pricing status that corresponds to a selected combination of plans and packages.

22. The online service of claim 21, wherein the pricing status is one of a set of statuses consisting of a price value, an "included" status, an "optional" status, and a "not available" status.

23. The online service of claim 1, wherein the database stores service offerings in a data structure having a plan component, a package component, and a feature component, wherein the plan component indicates a base offering, the package component indicates collections of features purchasable as a unit, and the feature component indicates augmentations to the base offering that are individually purchasable.

24. The online service of claim 23, wherein the plan component further indicates rules specifying which packages and features are combinable with specific plans.

25. The online service of claim 1, wherein the customization elements include an image identifying the brand partner, wherein the image is continually displayed to the customer during the customer's interaction with the computer.

26. The online service of claim 1, wherein the customization elements allow the brand partner to create an appearance which is uniquely associated with the brand partner.

27. The online service of claim 26, wherein the customization elements include layout, foreground color, background color, text color, logo, and a marketing image.

28. The online service of claim 26, wherein the customization elements include text content and font.

29. The online service of claim 1, wherein the order information is directed to service providers in notification form which allows the service providers to contact the customer directly to fulfill the order.

30. The online service of claim 1, wherein the order information is directed to service providers in emailed link form which allows the service providers to retrieve the order information from the online service using web-based software.

31. The online service of claim 1, wherein the order information is periodically retrieved by the appropriate service provider in XML form.

32. The online service of claim 1, wherein the communications from the service provider include data elements specific to a new service account for the customer, and further include a text message to the customer.

33. A method of facilitating provision of offering to customers, wherein the method comprises:

entering offering provider offerings received via the Internet into a database operated by a facilitation provider;

entering brand partner customization elements received via the Internet into the database;

adding customer accounts received via the Internet into the database for customers associated with brand partners;

generating from the database a list of offerings available to a customer based on an address associated with the customer, wherein the list is tailored according to customization elements of the associated brand partner,

transmitting the list of offerings to the customer via the Internet;

receiving order information from customers;

updating the database to reflect the order information;

providing the order information via the Internet to appropriate offering providers;

receiving communications from the offering providers regarding specific orders; and

updating the customer account in the database to reflect the communications.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the offerings comprise utilities, the brand partners comprise property managers, and the customers comprise tenants of properties managed by the property managers.

35. The method of claim 33, wherein the brand partners comprise educational institutions and armed forces.

36. The method of claim 33, wherein the brand partners include one or more offering providers.

37. The method of claim 33, wherein the offerings include goods for lease.

38. The method of claim 33, wherein the offerings include goods for purchase.

39. The method of claim 33, wherein the offerings include services for purchase.

40. The method of claim 33, further comprising:

sending a list of offering categories to the customer before said act of generating a list of

offerings, wherein the list of offering categories is selected based on the address

associated with the customer.

5   41. The method of claim 40, further comprising:

sending a comparison of customer-selected offerings in response to customer selection of

one or more offerings from said list of offerings.

42. The method of claim 41, wherein the comparison comprises a display page in tabular form

having a first portion displaying offering plans, a second portion displaying packages, and a third

10   portion displaying features, wherein the plans, packages, and features for a given offering are

confined to a corresponding column.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein the comparison includes a selection icon for each of the

packages, and further includes a selection icon for each row of features.

44. The method of claim 43, wherein the comparison includes a price for each offering, and

15   wherein the prices are dynamically updated to reflect a combined selection of plans and

packages.

45. The method of claim 43, wherein the comparison includes a pricing label for each feature of

each offering, and wherein the pricing labels are dynamically updated to reflect a pricing status

that corresponds to a selected combination of plans and packages.

20   46. The method of claim 45, wherein the pricing status is one of a set of statuses consisting of a

price value, an "included" status, an "optional" status, and a "not available" status.

47. The method of claim 46, wherein the database stores offerings in a data structure having a

plan component, a package component, and a feature component, wherein the plan component

indicates a base offering, the package component indicates collections of features purchasable as a unit, and the feature component indicates augmentations to the base offering that are individually purchasable.

48. The method of claim 33, wherein the plan component further indicates rules specifying which packages and features are combinable with specific plans.

49. The method of claim 33, wherein the customization elements include an image identifying the brand partner, wherein the image is continually displayed to the customer during the customer's interaction with the computer.

50. The method of claim 33, wherein the customization elements allow the brand partner to create an appearance which is uniquely associated with the brand partner.

51. The method of claim 50, wherein the customization elements include layout, foreground color, background color, text color, logo, and a marketing image.

52. The method of claim 50, wherein the customization elements include text content and font.

53. The method of claim 33, wherein the order information is provided to service providers in notification form which allows the offering providers to contact the customer directly to fulfill the order.

54. The method of claim 33, wherein the order information is provided to offering providers in emailed link form which allows the offering providers to retrieve the order information from the online service using web-based software.

55. The method of claim 33, wherein the order information is periodically retrieved by the appropriate offering provider via the Internet.

56. The method of claim 33, wherein the communications from the offering provider include data elements specific to a new service account for the customer, and further include a text message to the customer.

57. An online system for acquiring utilities, wherein the system comprises:

a facilitation provider coupled to the Internet;

a brand partner computer configured to interface with the facilitation provider via the Internet to allow creation of tenant accounts with the facilitation provider;

a tenant computer configured to interface with the facilitation provider via the Internet to allow establishment of utility services for the tenant.

58. The system of claim 57, wherein the brand partner is a real estate agent.

59. The system of claim 57, wherein the brand partner is a landlord.

60. An online service for facilitating provision of services to customers, wherein the online service comprises:

a network; and

at least one computer coupled to the network and configured to interact with service providers, brand partners, and customers via the network to maintain a database of service provider accounts, brand partner accounts, customer accounts,

wherein service providers enter service offerings in the database for access by customers,

wherein brand partners enter customization elements in the database,

wherein customers enter personal information in the database,

wherein the computer provides a list of service offerings to a customer customized in accordance with customization elements of a brand partner associated with the

customer and customized in accordance with an address associated with the

customer,

wherein the computer secures order information from customers and directs the order

information to appropriate service providers, and updates the customer account in

5   the database to reflect the orders,

wherein the computer receives communications from the service providers regarding

specific orders, and updates the customer account in the database to reflect the

communications.

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10   61. A method of selling a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple service categories representations of multiple service offerings,

wherein each service offering representation includes a plan component, a

package component, and a feature component;

providing an interactive display of one or more of the service offerings within a service

15   category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes selection icons

adjacent corresponding packages and rows of features specified by the

representations, and wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for

each displayed service offering; and

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon.

20   62. The method of claim 61, wherein the plan component includes one or more plans, the

package component includes zero or more packages, and the feature component includes zero or

more features.

63. The method of claim 61, further comprising:

updating the interactive display in response to actuations of selection icons, wherein the

updating includes:

revising a total price for each service offering to reflect a customer-selected

combination of plans, packages, and features.

64. The method of claim 61, further comprising:

updating the interactive display in response to actuations of selection icons, wherein the

updating includes:

revising an availability label for each feature for each offering to reflect a

customer-selected combination of plans, packages, and features.

65. The method of claim 64, wherein the availability label is one of: a price, an inclusion

indicator, an optional indicator, and an exclusion indicator.

66. The method of claim 61, wherein the order form provides entry fields for only those data

elements requested by the service provider for the selected offering.

67. The method of claim 61, further comprising:

receiving a completed order form;

determining if the ordered offering is dependent on an outstanding order, and if so,

waiting for fulfillment of the outstanding order;

providing order information to a service provider; and

receiving a response from the service provider.

68. The method of claim 67, wherein the response is indicative of fulfillment of the order.

69. The method of claim 68, wherein the response includes offering-specific information about

an account for the customer with the service provider.

70. The method of claim 67, further comprising:

provide an account summary display to the customer reflecting information contained

in the response from the service provider.

71. An online service provided by a computer network coupled to a network of computer

5   networks (an internet), wherein the service comprises:

a database including within multiple service categories, representations of multiple

service offerings, wherein each service offering representation includes a plan

component, a package component, and a feature component; and

a customer interface coupled to the database and configured to provide an interactive

10   comparison of one or more of the service offerings within a service category to a

customer, wherein the interactive comparison includes selection icons adjacent

corresponding packages and corresponding rows of features specified by the

representations, and wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for

each displayed service offering.

15   72. The service of claim 71, wherein the customer interface is configured to dynamically update a

total price for each service offering in the interactive comparison to reflect a customer-selected

combination of plans, packages, and features.

73. The service of claim 71, wherein the customer interface is configured to dynamically update

an availability label for each feature of each offering in the interactive comparison to account for

20   a customer-selected combination of plans and packages.

74. The service of claim 73, wherein the availability label is one of: a price, an inclusion

indication, an optional indication, and an exclusion indication.

75. The service of claim 71, wherein the customer interface is configured to provide an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon, and wherein the order form provides entry fields for only those data elements specified by the service provider for the selected offering.

76. The service of claim 75, wherein the customer interface is configured to update the database with information from a completed order form, and wherein the service further comprises:

a service provider interface configured to notify a service provider of an outstanding order, configured to allow the service provider to retrieve the order information, and configured to update the database with any responses received from the service provider.

77. The service of claim 76, wherein the response is indicative of fulfillment of the order.

78. The service of claim 77, wherein the response includes offering-specific information about an account for the customer with the service provider.

79. The service of claim 76, wherein the customer interface is further configured to provide an account summary reflecting information contained in the response from the service provider.

80. The service of claim 71, wherein the plan component includes:

a list of included features;

a list of available features;

a list of included packages;

a list of available packages;

a list of default packages;

a list of required custom data elements;

a list of required standard data elements;

a list of billing methods;

a list of payment methods; and

an indication of whether a package is required.

81. The service of claim 71, wherein the package component includes one or more package

5   elements, each having:

a list of included features;

a list of optional features;

a list of available features;

a list of excluded features;

10   a list of excluded packages;

an optional feature count;

a list of required custom data elements; and

a list of required standard data elements.

82. The service of claim 71, wherein the feature component includes one or more feature

15   elements, each having:

a list of required features;

a list of excluded features;

a list of included packages;

a list of required custom data elements; and

20   a list of required standard data elements.

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83. A system for selling online, wherein the system comprises:

a computer network coupled to an network of computer networks (an internet), and configured to

provide a facilitation service that includes:

  a database having representations of multiple offerings, wherein each offering has an

5   associated market; and

  an offering provider interface coupled to the database and configured to provide an

    interactive market definition display that allows offering providers to define

    markets for their service offerings.

84. The system of claim 83, wherein the display includes an entry field for designating a market

10 name that distinguishes the market from other markets.

85. The system of claim 83, wherein the display includes a state option, a county option, a zip

code option, and a property option, wherein the offering provider interface allows the offering

provider to make multiple selections under each option, and wherein the market is determined to

be the aggregation of the selections, absent any conflicts with other markets defined by the

15 offering provider.

86. The system of claim 83, wherein the display includes a continent option, a country option,

and a region option, wherein the offering provider interface allows the offering provider to make

multiple selections under each option, and wherein the market is determined to be the

aggregation of the selections, absent any conflicts with other markets defined by the offering

20 provider.

87. The system of claim 85, wherein markets are mutually exclusive, and counties, zip codes, and

properties from a given state are excluded from a market defined to include the given state when

those counties, zip codes, and properties are assigned to other markets.

88. The system of claim 85, wherein the offering provider interface allows an offering provider selecting the zip code option to enumerate a list of zip codes, and also allows the offering provider to specify a numeric range of zip codes, for inclusion in a market.

89. The system of claim 85, wherein the offering provider interface allows an offering provider selecting the property option to perform a search on properties in the database, and to select from properties in a list of search results.

90. The system of claim 83, further comprising:

a customer interface configured to search the database to provide a customer with a list of offering providers, wherein the search includes determining for each offering provider within a selected customer category the existence of an open market that includes an address associated with the customer, wherein the list includes only those offering providers having an open market.

91. A method for selling offerings, the method comprising:

defining a market, wherein said defining includes:

naming the market;

selecting one or more location size options;

for each location size option:

specifying multiple locations of that location size;

associating one or more offerings with the market;

receiving a customer address;

identifying a market that includes the customer address;

displaying one or more offerings associated with the market;

receiving a customer order for a offering; and

fulfilling the customer order.

92. The method of claim 91, wherein the location size options are: state, county, zip code, and property, and wherein the market is determined to be the aggregation of the locations specified under the location size options absent any conflicts with other markets defined by the service provider.

93. The method of claim 92, wherein markets are mutually exclusive, so that locations assigned to a first market from smaller location sizes are excluded from other markets having assigned locations from larger location sizes that overlap the assigned locations from smaller location sizes.

94. The method of claim 92, wherein when the zip code location size option is selected, the specifying includes at least one of: enumerating a list of zip codes; and providing a numeric range of zip codes.

95. The method of claim 92, wherein when the property location size is selected, the specifying includes:

    performing a search for properties meeting identified criteria; and

    selecting from a resulting list of properties.

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96. A system for selling an offering online, wherein the system comprises:

    at least one server coupled to a network of computer networks (an internet) and

        configured to service market database access requests received over the internet;

    a computer coupled to the server and configured to execute an interface application to

        remotely access a database on the server,

wherein the interface application is configured to create an offering representation for

storage in the database,

wherein the offering representation includes a status field having a value from a set of

status values that consists of Draft, To Be Active, Active, and Archived,

5   wherein the offering representation further includes a market field indicative of areas to

where the offering is available, and

wherein at most one of the offering representations from a given provider within a given

market field value has an Active status value.

97. The system of claim 96, wherein the computer replaces an active offering by designating a

10   Draft offering as To Be Active, wherein the server periodically updates the offering statuses in

the database, and at that time designates any To-Be-Active offerings as active, and any Active

offerings replaced in this manner as Archived.

98. The system of claim 96, further comprising:

a second computer coupled to the server and configured to execute a customer interface

15   to remotely access the database, wherein the customer interface is configured to

search the database for offerings satisfying certain criteria to offer to a customer,

wherein the criteria include a requirement for an Active status value.

99. A system for selling an offering online, wherein the system comprises:

at least one server coupled to a network of computer networks (an internet) and

20   configured to service market database access requests received over the internet;

a computer coupled to the server and configured to execute an interface application to

remotely access a database on the server,

wherein the interface application is configured to create an offering representation for storage in the database,

wherein the offering representation includes a market field indicative of areas to where the offering is available,

5   wherein the offering representation further includes at least one date range field indicative of the dates within which the offering is available,

wherein the server periodically determines which offering is available for a given market by examining the date range field; and

wherein if the current date is within the date range of more than one offering, then the

10   offering with the most recent start date is designated as the available offering.

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100. A method of selling an offering, wherein the method comprises:

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon, wherein the order form includes an entry field for designating a date for action by an offering

15   provider;

processing the order form in response to customer actuation of a submit icon, wherein the processing includes determining if the date satisfies constraint rules established by the offering provider, and

if not, re-displaying the order form with an error message; and

20   if so, providing the order information to the offering provider.

101. The method of claim 100, wherein the constraint rules specify a minimum lead time from submission of the order form.

102. The method of claim 100, wherein the constraint rules specify a maximum lead time from submission of the order form.

103. The method of claim 100, wherein the constraint rules specify one or more exclusion dates of the year.

5 104. The method of claim 100, wherein the constraint rules specify one or more exclusion days of the week.

105. A service provided by a computer network coupled to an network of computer networks (an internet), wherein the service comprises:

a database including representations of multiple offerings;

10 a customer interface coupled to the database and configured to provide a comparison of offerings within an offering category to a customer, and configured to provide an order form to the customer in response to customer actuation of an order icon, wherein the order form includes a field for designating a date, and wherein the customer interface verifies that the date satisfies constraint rules specified by the offering 15 representation.

106. The service of claim 105, wherein the constraint rules specify a minimum lead time from a current date.

107. The service of claim 105, wherein the constraint rules specify a maximum lead time from a current date.

20 108. The service of claim 105, wherein the constraint rules specify one or more exclusion dates.

109. The service of claim 105, wherein the constraint rules specify one or more exclusion days of the week.

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110. A method of facilitating sale of a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple service categories customized representations of multiple service offerings;

displaying one or more of the representations within a service category to a customer, wherein the display includes an order icon for each displayed service offering representation; and

displaying an order form for a selected service offering in response to customer actuation of an order icon, wherein the order form includes fields for entry of order information, wherein the order form includes only those entry fields specified in the customized representation for the selected service offering.

111. The method of claim 110, wherein the customized representation is created by a provider of the service offering.

112. The method of claim 110, further comprising:

supplying default values for the order form entry fields, wherein the default values are responses previously entered by the customer in response to similar entry fields.

113. A system for facilitating sales of service offerings, wherein the system comprises:

a computer network that implements:

a database having representations of multiple service offerings provided by various service providers, wherein each service offering has a customized representation that specifies information requested by the provider of that service offering, and specifies information required by the provider of that service offering; and

a customer interface coupled to the database and configured to display an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon associated with the service

offering, wherein the order form includes entry fields for only the requested and

required information specified by the customized representation of the service

offering.

114. The system of claim 113, wherein the customer interface accesses the database to determine

5   default values for the entry fields based on responses previously entered by the customer.

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115. A method of selling an offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple offering categories representations of multiple offerings, wherein

each offering representation includes one or more components;

10   providing an interactive display of one or more of the representations within an offering

category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes selection icons

adjacent corresponding components specified by the representations, and wherein

the interactive display includes an order icon for each displayed offering

representation;

15   determining a total price for each of the one or more offering representations displayed in

response to customer actuation of selection icons; and

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon,

wherein the total price is determined in accordance with one or more pricing rules,

wherein the pricing rules include discounts for selected combinations of components.

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116. A method of selling an offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple offering categories representations of multiple offerings, wherein each offering representation includes a plan component, a package component, and a feature component;

providing an interactive display of one or more of the representations within an offering

5   category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes selection icons adjacent corresponding packages and corresponding rows of features specified by the representations, and wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for each displayed offering representation; and

reconciling a selected combination of features with one or more feature combination rules

10   in response to customer actuation of an order icon.

117. The method of claim 116, wherein the reconciling includes:

determining if a most recently selected feature requires one or more unselected features, and if so, displaying a message indicating the required features.

118. The method of claim 117, wherein the reconciling further includes:

15   determining if a most recently selected feature conflicts with one or more other features in the selected combination, and if so, displaying a message indicating the conflict.

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119. A method of selling a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

20   generating in multiple service categories representations of multiple service offerings, wherein each service offering representation includes a plan component, a package component, and a feature component;

providing an interactive display of one or more of the representations within a service

category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes selection icons

adjacent corresponding packages and corresponding rows of features specified by

the representations, and wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for

5   each displayed service offering representation;

updating the interactive display in response to customer actuation of a package selection

icon to indicate a set of available features with corresponding selection icons; and

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon,

wherein when the package/feature selection rules include a requirement for a

10   predetermined number of available features, the order form includes a list of

features from which the predetermined number may be selected.

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120. A method of selling a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple service categories representations of multiple service offerings,

15   wherein each service offering representation includes a plan component, a

package component, and a feature component;

providing an interactive display of one or more of the representations within a service

category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes selection icons

adjacent corresponding packages and rows of features specified by the

20   representations, and wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for

each displayed service offering representation;

wherein the interactive display labels any features excluded by a plan as not available

under that plan; and

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon.

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121. A method of selling a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

generating in multiple service categories representations of multiple service offerings,

5   wherein each service offering representation includes a plan component, a

package component, a feature component, and a custom data component;

displaying one or more of the representations within a service category to a customer,

wherein the display includes an order icon for each displayed service offering

representation; and

10   displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon, wherein the

order form includes entry fields for additional order information specified by the

elements of the custom data component that are associated with any plans,

packages, and features selected by the customer.

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15   122. A method of purchasing a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

selecting a service category from a list of available service categories;

selecting one or more service providers from a list of available service providers

displayed in response to the selection of a service category;

comparing the selected service providers on an interactive comparison display, wherein

20   the comparing includes:

selecting components of service offerings offered by the selected service

providers;

examining total prices for each service offering, wherein the total prices are

reflective of the selected components;

selecting a chosen service provider;

completing an order form displayed in response to the selection of a chosen service

5   provider.

123. The method of claim 122, wherein the service offerings each consist of one plan.

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124. A method of discontinuing a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

viewing a list of service offerings to which a customer has subscribed, wherein each

10   service offering has a corresponding disconnect indicator;

selecting a disconnect indicator of a chosen service offering;

completing a termination form displayed in response to the selection of the disconnect

indictor; and

submitting the termination form.

15   125. A method of discontinuing a service offering, wherein the method comprises:

actuating a disconnect button;

selecting an address from a list of addresses associated with a customer;

selecting a service category from a list of available service categories associated with the

selected address;

20   selecting a service provider associated with said service offering;

completing a termination form displayed in response to said selecting a service provider;

and

submitting the termination form.

126. A method of selling a second service offering that depends upon subscription to a first service offering, the method comprising:

    accepting an order from a customer for the second service offering;

5   determining if an order for the first service offering has been processed, and if not,

            queuing the order for the second service offering until the order for the first

            service offering has been processed.

127. The method of claim 126, further comprising:

    determining if the order for the first service offering has failed, and if so, removing the

10   order for the second service offering from the queue.

128. The method of claim 126, further comprising: before said act of accepting an order for the second service offering,

    accepting an order for the first service offering;

    providing an order form for the second service offering, wherein the order form includes

15   an entry field for a target data item, wherein the order form provides a list of

            default values for the entry field, and wherein one of the default values is a

            dependence indicator of the order for the first service offering.

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129. A method of purchasing a service, wherein the method comprises:

20   selecting a service category from a list of available service categories;

    selecting one or more service providers from a list of available service providers

        displayed in response to the selection of a service category;

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selecting one or more service plans from a list of available service plans displayed in response to the selection of service providers;

comparing the selected service plans on an interactive comparison display, wherein the comparing includes:

5   selecting components of service plans offered by the selected service providers;

examining total prices for each service plan, wherein the total prices are reflective of the selected components;

selecting a chosen service provider;

completing an order form displayed in response to the selection of a chosen service plan.

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130. A method of selling an offering, wherein the method comprises:

determining offering restrictions associated with a brand partner, wherein the restrictions are established by an administrative hierarchy to which the brand partner belongs, wherein restrictions established by the brand partner must comply with

15   restrictions established by other levels in the hierarchy;

providing an interactive display of one or more offerings within a service category to a customer, wherein the interactive display includes an order icon for each displayed offering, and wherein the displayed offerings comply with the offering restrictions; and

20   displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon.

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131. A method of selling an offering, wherein the method comprises:

establishing a customer account for a customer;

providing an display of one or more offerings within a category to the customer, wherein

the display includes an order icon for each displayed offering representation;

displaying an order form in response to customer actuation of an order icon;

accepting a completed order form from the customer and providing an order to an

5   offering provider;

receiving a communication from the offering provider to the customer;

forwarding the communication to the customer.

132. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

displaying the communication to the customer in an account summary page.

10   133. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

emailing the communication to the customer.

134. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

paging the customer.

135. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

15   faxing the communication to the customer.

136. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

converting the communication into an audio message;

initiating a phone call to the customer to deliver the audio message.

137. The method of claim 131, wherein the forwarding includes:

20   mailing the communication to the customer.

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138. A data interchange computer which comprises:

a memory configured to store software;

at least one processor configured to execute said software, wherein the software causes the processor to:

periodically request a list of stored messages from a source that are intended for a predetermined destination; and

5   for each stored message in the list,

retrieve from the source a file containing the message;

convert the file into a destination message having a destination-specific format;

send the destination message to the destination;

10   monitor the destination for a result file corresponding to the destination message;

retrieve the result file;

transform the result file into a source message having a source-specific format; and

15   send the source message to the source.

139. The computer of claim 138, wherein said acts of retrieving and sending are accomplished via a network.

140. The computer of claim 138, wherein as part of said converting act, the software causes the processor to:

20   process a script file that specifies a method for converting the file into a destination message.

141. The computer of claim 140, wherein an alteration of the destination-specific format is accommodated by edits to the script file.

142. The computer of claim 138, wherein as part of said converting act, the software causes the processor to:

pre-process the file to extract message items of interest and to store the message items of interest in an XML format; and

5   map the message items of interest into a database record.

143. The computer of claim 142, wherein an alteration of the database format is accommodated by edits to a map file.

144. The computer of claim 138, wherein the software is multi-threaded, and wherein each stored message is processed by a dedicated thread that is executable in parallel with other threads.

10   145. The computer of claim 138, wherein the software further causes the processor to:

provide a graphical user interface on a display, wherein the graphical user interface includes:

a log of processor acts caused by the software; and

a status of each source and destination.

15   146. The computer of claim 138, wherein the source-specific format is XML.

147. The computer of claim 138, wherein the destination-specific format is configurable to each of a set of formats including: delimited format, plain text format, HTML format, and XML format.

148. The computer of claim 138, wherein the software further causes the processor to:

20   notify a logger process of events, wherein the logger process organizes events into a coherent form.

149. The computer of claim 148, wherein the logger process is executing on a separate computer.

150. The computer of claim 149, wherein the logger process monitors events from more than one data interchange computer, and maintains events from each data interchange computer in a respective window.

151. The computer of claim 148, wherein the logger process screens events according to a configurable severity level.

152. The computer of claim 148, wherein the events include retrieval of files from the source, transmission of destination messages to the destination, retrieval of result files, and transmission of source messages to the source.